

1356. i. 39.

AN
E S S A Y,

TENDING TO SHEW

“ The advantages which result to REVE-
LATION, from its being conveyed to us
in the form of HISTORY.”

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



3

2/20

AN
E S S A Y,

TENDING TO SHEW
THE ADVANTAGES WHICH RESULT TO
REVELATION,
FROM ITS BEING CONVEYED TO US IN THE FORM
OF HISTORY.

*Published, in pursuance of the Will of the late Mr. Norris, as having gained
the Annual Prize instituted by him in the University of Cambridge.*

BY
JOHN SPENCER COBBOLD, A.M.
FELLOW OF GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE.

SEGNIS IRRITANT ANIMOS DEMISSA PERAUREM,
QUAM QUÆ SUNT OCULIS SUBJECTA —

Her.

Coventry:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY N. ROLLASON;
SOLD ALSO BY MESS. RIVINGTONS, AND LUNN, OXFORD-STREET,
LONDON; DEIGHTON, CAMBRIDGE; COOKE, OXFORD;
JERMYN, IPSWICH; GEDGE & RACKHAM, BURY;
GREGORY, LEICESTER; AND PEARSON,
BIRMINGHAM. 1797.



TO
THE REVEREND
RICHARD FISHER BELWARD, D.D.

MASTER OF GONVILE AND CAIUS COLLEGE,

AND

VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

OF

CAMBRIDGE,

THIS ESSAY

IS

WITH SENTIMENTS OF

RESPECT,

ESTEEM,

AND

GRATITUDE

INSCRIBED,

Published by the same Author,

A NORRISSIAN
PRIZE ESSAY,

TENDING TO SHew

IN WHAT SENSE JESUS CHRIST



" LIFE AND IMMORTALITY BRING LIGHT THROUGH THE
GOSPEL." Price 1s.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author is sensible how little novelty the arguments advanced in the following Essay have to recommend them to the notice of the *Theologian*, unless, perhaps, the novelty of their *application*; and of this he is by no means confident—The importance of the subject is such as leads to the supposition, that it must already have been frequently discussed, and the nature of it readily suggests the train of reasoning here pursued. He begs leave, however, to observe, that no dissertation on the subject ever fell under his perusal, and that, since he turned his thoughts to the consideration of it, he has purposely avoided all kinds of reading, which might be even collaterally connected with it.

As an advocate for Revelation, he deems it still more necessary to make this observation, in order to obviate any ill consequences from the defects of a performance, which, whatever comparative merit may be implied in the academical distinction conferred on it, cannot be supposed to have embraced all that might be said on the subject to render it *publicly* beneficial.

ESSAYS

&c.

REVELATION is a communication of the will and purposes of God to man, considered, in relation to the Supreme Being, as a moral and responsible creature.

The design of the following pages, is, to point out the advantages connected with that mode of communication, which lies through the channel of History. Now, as the question to be discussed is, in some sort, of a comparative nature, it will be of use, in the first place, to take a view of the different modes of communication, which may be thought to contest the palm

of preference with that, of which it is the object of this Essay to point out the advantages:—every disadvantage attendant on the latter, and not discoverable in the former, will be a sort of negative weight in the scale of the latter, which, if it does not *absolutely* depress the balance in its favour, will, yet, give it a *relative* preponderance.

The several modes, by which we may conceive a divine communication to be made to man, exclusive of that which is offered through the medium of History, are principally, if not only two—

I. Either by a distinct Revelation made to each individual—or

II. By a systematic code of Ethics, once published by divine authority, and since transmitted down for the direction of posterity.

Each of these methods will be found to labour under disadvantages peculiar to itself.

I. One obvious disadvantage attendant upon the former of them, is the field it opens to the practice of delusion and imposture. As *private* Revelation is a subject, which disclaims the test of human cognizance, few would find a difficulty in seeing a Revelation, where they wished one; and fewer would hesitate to pretend one, where they could so easily escape detection. Thus, public confidence would be destroyed, and one half of the world would live in a state of perpetual exposure to the frauds and enthusiasm of the other.—

Another disadvantage is seen in the derogation of such a mode of Revelation from the dignity and majesty of the Revealer, and the inadequacy of it to the purposes, for which it was designed.—If the Revelation be attended with any evidence short of the power of compulsion, however it may for a time awe the mind of man into submission, it will come, at

length, to be contemplated with philosophical indifference; as the frequency of the phenomenon obliterates surprize, it will be resolved into the effects of the common course of Nature; and, having no better support than individual affirmation, it will no sooner come to be disputed, than it will be disregarded, if not discredited—it will operate no more as a restraint on the subjects of it, than the laws of Nature operate to the restraint of the advocates of Natural Religion:—greater degrees of hardness would require more signal interpositions—more rigorous threats, and more certain execution of them:—the *necessity* of interposition would increase with interposition—the disease with the application of the remedy; till, paradoxical as it may seem, the familiarity of the interposition would call in question the reality of it.

On the other hand, if the attestations afforded to the truth of the Revelation be

such, as can neither be misunderstood by human ignorance, evaded by human ingenuity, nor disregarded by human audacity, the disadvantages may be varied but will neither be lessened nor removed: a conviction of the *present* Deity would over-rule the will—human free agency would be violated—virtue annihilated; and man degraded from a condition of moral responsibility to a state of passive machinery.

The method of communicating Revelation through the medium of History is exempt from these disadvantages. In its nature, it offers no encouragement to the artifices of the interested, or the delusion of the credulous; and, in fact, like the Scriptures we possess, *may* operate to the confutation of the one, and the prevention of the other. It consults, also, the dignity of the Revealer; in exempting him from the evils of perpetual manifestation. Familiarity is the parent of Indifference—

we view with greater awe what we contemplate at a distance, and even the Deity, by too near an inspection, would suffer in the diminution of his Majesty. The Jewish Theocracy, while it furnishes an illustration of the remark, will add to its confirmation. Whether Jews or Ægyptians,* each evinced the influence of habit. Every successive manifestation of divine displeasure laid the foundation of another, and warns us, from its effects upon the infant age of the world, what to expect from its operation in the more enlarged state of its maturity.

An Historical Revelation at once consults the Majesty of the Revealer, without detracting from his activity—it connects efficiency with dignity—the most hardened may be reclaimed by its energy; while the distance, to which it removes

* In allusion to the plagues of Ægypt.

the supreme actor, secures him from the disrespect of familiarity.

An historical Revelation, moreover, is a means the best adapted to its end. It applies to the hopes and fears of man—it addresses him with motives sufficient to induce, but not to compel; and while it preserves his freedom, secures his responsibility.

II. The mode of Revelation by a systematic code of Ethics once published and since transmitted down for the direction of posterity, is liable to equal and more obvious disadvantages. Its moral obligation will be in exact proportion to men's conviction of its authenticity, and, without the aid of History, it is not easy to see on what grounds it will vindicate its credibility.—It is unnecessary to point out the use to be made of the foregoing observations. In questions of comparison, we

employ ideas only of relation—excellence is argued from correlative deficiency; and a disadvantage on one side implies a negative advantage on the other.

A Revelation, however conveyed through the channel of History, does not rest its claim to notice on the merit of *negative* advantages; it possesses, also, merits of a *positive* nature, too obvious to be overlooked, and too important to be disregarded.

The great object of a Revelation is, *to be believed, and, by the operation of belief, to influence the practice.* This object will be best attained by the mode of Revelation, which unites, in the best manner, and highest degree, the three following advantages;

I. A strength of evidence to command assent to its pretensions;

II. A clear exposition of duties :

III. And a supply of motives to stimulate to the observance of them.

An Historical Revelation aspires to this character, and a little observation will satisfy us of the justice of its claims.

The probable advantages or disadvantages of any system are best calculated from experiment.—Thus, the extent of human Reason is best ascertained by recurring to the times prior to Evangelical illumination; and the advantages of Historical Revelation may be best calculated from a reference to its effects in the actual operation of our Scriptures.

I. The two grand supports of Revelation, most conformable to our natural expectations, as well as adopted in Scripture, are Miracles and Prophecy.

In every embassy, it is reasonable to expect that the Ambassador should speak the language of his Master, and that his credentials should comport with the dignity of his commission. The language of Heaven is Miracles—a language we are warranted in our expectation of the Deity's employing, as being the most universally intelligible, and the best calculated for his purposes. It is a language adapted to the apprehension of the most ignorant, and the conviction of the most learned. A dead man restored to life cannot be contemplated with indifference: curiosity would be awakened by concern: from curiosity about the *fact*, the transition would be easy to an interpretation of its *meaning*.—The laws of nature cannot be suspended but by the action or permission of the God of Nature; and pretensions, which come recommended by the shew of supernatural interposition, challenge, if not immediate belief, at least, a respectful inves-

tigation. The use, however, in this view, to which miracles are applicable, will be regulated by the distance, to which the knowledge of them is communicated. Unless History is made the vehicle of their circulation, their effects will terminate where they began—their immediate witnesses will profit by them, while future ages will be left to build their faith on the uncertainty of oral tradition, or, together with the knowledge of them, be utterly precluded from the benefit of their attestation.

The same observation applies to *Prophecy*, with force proportionably greater, as its adaptation to the circumstances of Posterity is evidently better.—Of Prophecies we may distinguish two classes—those which have had their completion, and those which remain to be completed. In respect to Posterity, the former rank in the catalogue of *Miracles*, while the latter stake their credit on their eventual accomplishment. The ends

of each, however, would be frustrated by the difficulties of publication, under which, in defect of History, they would labour. *These* would lose their effect, for want of being historically perpetuated, *those* would be inapplicable to their antitype, for want of being historically recorded.

Another principal advantage, which results from the adoption of History for the conveyance of Revelation, is the opportunity it offers of *internal* evidence for the proof of its pretensions. By whatever semblance of supernatural interposition Revelation solicits our attention, on the harmony of its internal evidence with its external attestations it must ultimately rest its claim to our conviction.—The internal evidence of a Revelation results from a comparison of all the circumstances, plain and indirect, collateral and remote, which arise out of the writings, lives, and fortunes of those employed in its publication. The more vari-

ously these are multiplied and combined, the more materials are supplied of proof or confutation. A knowledge of them, however, is necessary to their utility in this view, and by what other means this knowledge is attainable, than through the medium of narrative, seems not easy to discover. It is History that furnishes these raw materials, which Reason manufactures into subtle arguments.

We will illustrate the observation by a reference to our own Scriptures:—the use of History, in authenticating their *private* pretensions, will stamp the *general* utility of such a mode of communication.

One internal advantage which, Revelation derives from the use of History, is the opportunity afforded it of proving its pretensions by the investigation of the Harmony of its several parts; and the greater

the impediments in the way of Harmony, the greater credit will be due to the narrative which harmonizes.

An obvious difficulty in the way of Scriptural consistency, is the great portion of time Scripture-History comprizes, which must of necessity give rise to a multitude of events, as infinite in their variety, as intractable in their complication.

Another circumstance of difficulty in harmonizing Scripture, is found in *the difference of tastes and talents of the writers of its records*—a difference, which will easily find credit, when it is considered, that they are the production of every variety of condition, from the loftiness of Monarchy to the lowliness of mechanic Industry.

Another obstacle in the way of the harmony of Scripture, is the *minuteness* with which it details the particulars of its His-

tory. The more the circumstances of time, place, action, and incident are multiplied, the greater room will be afforded for the creeping in of inconsistency and error. Notwithstanding, however, the difficulties mentioned, and others which might be added, the Scripture harmonizes to a wonderful degree. The more it is investigated, the greater will be the conviction of its narrative consistency: latent and undefined coincidences will add strength to the more obvious instances of agreement, and the whole will reflect a degree of credit on Revelation, which would in vain be sought for from any other quarter than Historical relation.

Another internal advantage, resulting to Revelation from the use of History in the conveyance of it, is the evidence it offers in the character and conduct of those concerned in the propagation of it. The evidence of this sort to be collected from the Scriptures, in favour of their authenticity, is

such as can neither be controverted by sophistry, nor evaded by ingenuity.

The first thing observable in the character of the sacred writers, which makes much for the credit of their pretensions, is the *unostentatious simplicity*, with which they detail the most interesting events. Their record of a miracle is as destitute of the pomp of language, as it is of the pride of enthusiasm. We see no preparatory attempt to mislead the judgment by dazzling the imagination: "Rise and walk" were the words, by which the lame man was restored, and the dead man was revived:—The conscious element blushed itself to wine at the mere presence of Divinity; and the imperious Ocean, at the words, "Peace, be still," sunk into obedient tranquillity. The dignified silence, also, with which these stupendous events are dismissed, is as remarkable as the unostentatious simplicity, with which they are introduced. We meet with no comments upon them,

to heighten their effect, or to point to their design. They are left to work upon the mind by their own native significance, and to prevail only as far as, by their own inherent efficacy, they convince. Of the force of this argument, we are, perhaps, not sufficiently aware. It may be collected, however, from an inspection of the fabulous legends of Antiquity.—The pompous narrative of pretended interposition forms such a remarkable contrast with the unadorned simplicity of Scriptural narration, that none can compare them without being sensible of a difference as striking as it is conclusive. Of this argument, however, we must have been destitute, but for the intervention of History.

Another circumstance, which removes the veracity of the sacred writers a degree further from suspicion, is the *publicity* of their miracles, and the implied, as well as

express intention of challenging the confutation of them. The events recorded are not said to have been "done in a corner." The theatre chosen for their display, was the two renowned seats of arts and literature, imperial Rome and enlightened Athens—situations the most inimical to the designs of imposture, or the reveries of Superstition—where was wanting neither ability to detect, nor inclination to confute; and where the claims of a new Religion were as jealously watched by one set of men, as the idea of political innovation was deprecated by another.

The sacred writers, however, not content with the challenge of confutation implied in the mention of the circumstances of time and place, strengthen their credit by an open appeal to individual and public knowledge. They call upon contemporaries—upon eye-witnesses—upon enemies as well friends; and, while they escape unimpeach-

ed in their veracity, afford a strong argument, deducible only through the channel of History, for the support of their credibility.

Another remarkable circumstance, which advances the credit of the sacred writers a step higher, is the *candour* and *impartiality* of their narrative. Far from employing studied panegyric on themselves or their associates, they conceal none of their faults, but with artless ingenuoufness, relate all the truth, however it may involve their own failings or even vices. They relate the treachery of one; the incredulity of another; the cowardice of a third, and the criminal irresolution, as well as ambition of all. Would this have been the method employed by Impostors to advance their credit in the eyes of a multitude, whom they wished to win over to their designs? It cannot be supposed—and this argument,

in favour of Revelation, we derive from the adoption of History in the conveyance of it.

Added to the qualifications of the Apostles already mentioned, their general *humility*, *patience* and *philanthropy* (of which, but for their being historically perpetuated in their records, we should have been ignorant,) afford singly and collectively strong presumption in favour of their credibility. Men of known and tried virtue do not usually depart in any great degree from the line of practical consistency.

But, of all the features in the Apostolic character, that of undaunted *boldness*, while it is the most prominent, furnishes, in favour of Apostolic veracity, matter of the strongest argument. The Apostles resolutely preached Christ crucified and the doctrine of a Resurrection in the ears of its bitterest opposers. There was no interest

so dear to them, which they did not sacrifice to their conscience. They courted sufferings in every shape by their inflexible adherence to the execution of their commission; and even Death, arrayed in all the horrors, which ingenious cruelty could devise, was ineffectual to shake the firm basis of their purposes. Is it credible, that men would eagerly surrender every thing dear to them in this world, without any prospect of compensation in another?—or that they would submit to the most agonizing tortures, on the bare proposal to themselves of practising an *useless* imposture upon the world? The only thing, which can be said, is, that the moral utility, which it was *foreseen* would be the consequence of the imposture, prompted the sacrifices, by which it was supported. But this is to confound the plainness of Fishermen with the acuteness of Philosophers, and to ascribe to the former a degree of

insight into the natures of things, hardly attainable by the latter. The intrepidity, then, with which the Apostles faced dangers, and even welcomed death, must be allowed to make much for their sincerity; as their sincerity, under the opportunities which they had of information, does for their credibility. The characters, however, of the Apostles would have been unknown, had they not been historically delineated; and Revelation would have wanted that support, which results from a critical investigation of them.

Another argument, which we are indebted to History for supplying us with, is seen in the *disproportion between the magnitude of the conversion wrought by Revelation, and the seeming meanness of the instruments by which it was effected.*—Twelve poor, friendless Fishermen undertake to rescue a world from the dominion of vices the most habitual, and prejudices the most

inveterate. In their struggle, they had to contend with the bigotry of the Jew, and the licentiousness of the Heathen—they had to conciliate a profligate populace by the unpalatable doctrines of self-denial and mortification, and to appease an enraged magistracy by the over-throw of their long-established superstitions. Yet under all these disadvantages, “ the word of God grew and multiplied exceedingly.” Thousands pressed into the service of the Gospel. The Heathen saw with jealousy his temples forsaken, on which had been lavished all that could enchant the senses, and the Jew looked with envy on the alarming desertion of the long established worship of his forefathers. In a few ages Christianity was almost every where diffused; and we, of the present day, owe the blessing of its enjoyment to the exertions of the first propagators of it. To account for effects so disproportionate to their means, we must

have recourse to the intervention of an over-ruling Providence; the admission of which involves in it the credibility of the events, which are made the ground-work of the effects.

Another advantage still, which accrues to Revelation from the Historic form of its conveyance, is the *opportunity it offers to its enemies of all ages of trying its pretensions*; and, while a Porphyry, a Celsus, and a Julian, in vain assail it, like the sturdy oak, it derives strength from being exposed to their impotent attacks.

It may be of use here to recapitulate what has been advanced—the sum of which is this—Revelation, by being conveyed in the form of History, possesses superior advantages of proving its pretensions, viz.

By Miracles.

By Prophecy.

By its internal evidence resulting from the harmony of itself, and the character of its writers.

By its success in the conversion of the World.

And by the opportunity it offers to its enemies of *all* ages of confuting its claims,

II. We proceed now to consider the second superiority claimed by a Revelation conveyed in the form of History—a *clearer exposition of duties.*

† The only alternative, if a Revelation is not conveyed in the form of History, is the publication of a systematic code of Ethics—The disadvantages, however, of such a

† Note,—The author is aware of one other mode of Revelation mentioned in the beginning of these pages, but thinks himself released from the obligation of any further notice of a mode, the disadvantages of which are so obvious.

code will be seen in the frequently-recurring difficulty of interpretation. The statutes of our own realm, while they confirm the remark, will serve for an illustration. Many of them, by the remoteness of their origin, and their inapplicability to present circumstances, bid defiance to the united powers of industry and erudition to expound them. Hence the necessity of inventing what, in legal phraseology, are termed *Reports*, which, by shewing how the laws operated under certain circumstances, regulate the practice in all future similar situations.

A Revelation, like the Evangelical History, possesses this advantage among others equally remarkable. Christ and his Apostles are a kind of living commentary on the Gospel—we observe the latitude, in which certain doctrines and precepts were admitted by those, who were best enabled to understand them, and thence collect the sense and degree of their more general obli-

gation.—We will produce an instance or two, which, while they point out the unavoidable difficulties of preceptive instruction, will exhibit clearly the value of historical explication.

One source of difficulty is the *imperfection of Language*.—Many precepts, as in Scripture, are expressed in terms of absolute positiveness, which require to be restrained by limitations of conditionality, while others of *general* signification are justly restricted by conditions of *particularity*:—without the guide of History, we should be equally at a loss in the interpretation and application of them: But, by observing their operation on the lives and practice of those, who might be supposed to act upon them, we come to draw them into an useful and practicable precedent for the regulation of our conduct.

Again—The precepts of Revelation, being calculated for different places, persons, and

times, would be apt, unless God exerted himself by a perpetual miracle to repeal them as they grew obsolete, to be interpreted to their own prejudice by those, to whom they were not applicable; but the occasion and circumstances, which gave rise to them, being related, would sufficiently define them; while this definition would stand in the place of a formal abrogation.

It is another, and no inconsiderable advantage derived to Revelation from the use of History, that it gives opportunity of precepts and doctrines being enquired into and discussed, which discussion is favourable to elucidation. Of this many examples might be pointed out in scripture, which would illustrate the observation and confirm its truth.

Historical detail has, likewise, the advantage of *practically* shewing on what occasions the letter of the law may be dispensed

with, and, when two or more duties clash, which of them, by its relative importance, is entitled to a preference.

Another advantage, which it possesses, is the means it affords of applying *general* principles to *particular* cases.—All laws, founded on the broad basis of comprehending a community, will be naturally framed on principles, as well as expressed in terms of generality, which it will frequently be difficult to bend to the private circumstances of an individual.—An historical review, however, of their application, in the conduct or exposition of the Legislator, or those whom he commissions, will remove the difficulty: we are no longer left to wander in the uncertainties of conjecture, or forego the benefit of a salutary prescription from the intractability of its application.

Historical Revelation possesses yet another advantage over a systematick code of Ethics.

—In such a code, a law would probably be expressed but once—if it then laboured under obscurity, it would stand little chance of collateral elucidation.—History, on the other hand, dwells upon a moral precept of importance—it presents it to our view in every varied shape of language and of circumstance—Comparison derives light upon it from a diversity of expression; and the conduct of those, who under a variety of circumstances, are seen to act upon it, is a clue to its interpretation.

Lastly, an Historical Revelation instructs us in the practice of many little endearments and charities, which, though they constitute the sum of human happiness, come not within the abilities of language to define—it admits of the use of familiar parables, and the introduction of domestic incidents, where our feelings prove our guide, and Nature our interpreter.

We have seen, then, that a Revelation, conveyed in the form of History, possesses exclusive advantages in the exposition of duties from the following considerations;

It supplies all the circumstances of relation and connection, which account for their origin and direct their application.

It affords opportunity of their discussion, which is favorable to elucidation.—

It better stamps the dispensation and regulates the subordination of duties.

It affords opportunity of applying general rules to particular cases.

It possesses the advantage of frequent, and varied repetition of a precept.

And, lastly, it teaches many little charities sympathetically, that cannot be expressed verbally.

III. We proceed now to consider the superiority, which an Historical Revelation lays claim to, in the *motives* it supplies for the performance of what it teaches.

In entering upon this question, it is expedient to remark, that whatever makes for the credibility of Revelation, affords incitement to obey it.—If Revelation be proved to be true, it cannot be neglected but at our peril. Every argument, therefore, which, under the first head of enquiry, went to prove the *authenticity* of Revelation, may be considered in effect to supply a motive for obedience. An historical Revelation, however, boasts a supply of motives distinct from what are involved in the arguments of its authenticity.

One source of motives will be found in the *superior impression* made upon the mind by historical exemplification:—we are more powerfully urged, in proportion as we are

more deeply interested: hence we sooner feel the force of what is practically exhibited, than of what is morally inculcated. History exhibits practically, what it is the province of morality to inculcate theoretically.—It transports us into situations, where we appropriate a share of the concern; and, while we are contemplating an impulse on the imagination, we are suddenly surprized into a moral conclusion.—The possible advantage of History to Revelation, in this point of view, will be easily explained, by a reference to instances of illustration.—Thus, the History of God's dealing with his chosen people the Jews, as it manifests his Providence, supplies a motive for our submission and dependance.—That it too frequently fails of its effect is no argument against its existence.—A motive is not the less so by being disregarded; of which, as the actual

success depends upon a combination of extrinsic causes, so the casual failure is not to be ascribed to a negation of all *natural* influence. A man, that is not moved by an actual representation of a governing Providence, will be still less influenced by a verbal assertion of it.—*Superiority* of influence will thus be conceded to the former, and it is superiority of influence only that we feel ourselves interested in defending.

In like [manner, God's following up the crimes of the Israelites with the constant infliction of punishment, as it shews his abhorrence of sin, so it powerfully urges us to the practice of virtue—The terror of punishment would soon vanish unsupported by the experience of infliction.—History affords an opportunity of this experience being transmitted down with an accuracy, inferior only to that acquired

by personal feeling, and, while it alarms our imaginations, influences our actions.

Again—The History of Gods wonderful forbearance with his people, as it shews his mercy, supplies a motive for our Repentance.

In short—whether we consider God's dealing with the Jews in relation to their collective or individual capacity, the whole Bible-History is a series of the soundest lessons of morality, enforced by motives of the greatest *natural* efficacy.—

History is, also, an useful auxiliary to Revelation, in the scope it gives for the exercise of one of the strongest impulses of Nature—the principle of *gratitude*.—Thus, it is impossible to read the sacred records with appropriate attention, and

not be penetrated with a grateful sense of the divine favour, which, if left to its own natural energy, would terminate in obedience.—The goodness of God is discovered dawning in the original blessing of man's Creation—we trace it through the infinite variety of mercy manifested in his Preservation; till it arrives at the stupendous period of his Redemption.—In this last exertion of divine Benevolence, we discover a world of motives, the force of which concentrated is calculated to enflame with more than ordinary emotion. “The high and holy One, that inhabiteth eternity,” dismisses the Son of his bosom on the painful errand of Salvation—This blessed personage, who “thought it no robbery to be equal with God,” appears “in the likeness of sinful man.” He submits to all the helpless imbecility of Infancy, and the hard lot of Indigence and Obscurity—The path of his maturer

years is strewn only with the thorns of adversity, and he closes a life, spent in the indefatigable pursuit of pouring balm into the wounds of suffering humanity, by a death of cruelty and ignominy.—Here, while, lost in admiration of the august sacrifice, we are led to inquire into its intention, how must it touch our sensibility to be informed, that the end proposed by its ever-blessed Author was the good—the everlasting good of man!—that for the attainment of this object, “he endured the cross, despising the shame”! that “by his stripes”—stripes of our own infliction, “we are healed”! and by his death, of our own soliciting, we revive! In vain would the Moralist attempt to make impression, where mount Calvary presents only a barren scene of speculation: every part of which is calculated, by the inspiration of ardent gratitude, to animate to the most cheerful obedience.

Another motive results from the *confidence*, which the vehicle of History gives opportunity of inspiring. Our confidence in the sanctions of a Revelation will be determined by the opinion we entertain of the *sincerity* and *ability* of the Revealer.—We could derive little hope from the one unsupported by the other, as it is from the narrative of History we must collect the degree of both—A Founder of Religion might deliver doctrines, upheld by whatever sanctions; but on the evidence of his sincerity and ability, as witnessed by his conduct, he must rest his claim to their influential importance.—This remark will be both illustrated and verified by a reference to the History of our Saviour; whose whole life, sufferings, and death exhibit as incontestible marks of his sincerity, as the triumph of his Resurrection does of his power.—Yet, without the intervention of History, we should

have been precluded the benefit of these data—for the subserviency of which, however, to the inspiration of confidence, every one may safely be referred to his own bosom; as well as for the influence derived from such confidence upon his conduct.

The fourth, and last way we shall notice, in which a Revelation will be benefited by History, in the point of view we are considering its utility, is in the opportunity it gives Virtue of operating by *example*.—Imitation is a very active principle interwoven in the human constitution—it usurps supreme rule during the infancy of Reason, and not unfrequently contests her claim when she arrives at her maturity—directed to its proper object, it has all the force of precept, without the labour of instruction; and we feel its influence more powerfully,

while we admit its authority more cheerfully. In whatever moral scheme, then, this principle can be associated, a powerful ally will be gained to its interest; and the Moralist will be prudent to endeavour its acquisition in proportion to its importance, and the danger of its perversion. To effect this purpose, the only way, exclusive of actual representation, is through the channel of Historical description. This portrays with a fidelity little inferior to reality, and even claims a superiority in the advantage of its permanency. We confess its utility in our adopted system of education, and its observable effects on the youthful mind justify us in anticipating its *general* expediency.—Indeed, its operation is more universal, as its means are more natural: it applies to the heart, while a dry precept applies only to the understanding—it familiarizes morality to the senses, as it were, by incarnation; and, while it assists

conception, stimulates to action.—Of its use in the sacred records let every one be referred to his own feelings for a testimony.—Who can resist the influence of a Paul's zeal? Or, who can see the son of God expiring on the cross and want an argument for patience? Examples to the same purport might be selected as infinite in their variety, as powerful in their efficacy—every page teems with them—the fortitude of one, the humility of another, and the patience of all are so strongly painted in the colours of exemplification, that it is impossible to read them with attention, and not be warmed with an imitative enthusiasm.

The sum of the observations just made is this—To the motives for obedience to a Revelation, resulting from the arguments offered in behalf of its authenticity, are to be added the following.

E

The *impression* made upon the mind by
Historical exemplification.

The natural influence of the principle of
gratitude.

The *confidence* inspired by an accurate
knowledge of the Revealer.

And the power of *example* in influencing
by the force of emulation.

We shall here close our enquiry, the result of which, we trust, will be a conviction of Revelation being benefited by an historical conveyance, in a superior enjoyment of the three following advantages:

I. A strength of evidence to command assent to its pretensions.

II. A clear exposition of duties.

III. And a supply of motives, stimulate to the observance of them.

We shall only remark, further, that, the object of a Revelation being a belief of its pretensions and a conformable practice, it is difficult to see what further benefit it is capable of receiving.

May a sense of superior advantages be productive of a superior degree of gratitude! and may an adequate improvement under their influence avert the more rigorous punishment due to a neglect of them!

In conclusion, it will be proper to observe, that, in the foregoing investigation, Revelation being understood in the more general sense of *any* divine communication, the scriptural instances are quoted, not so much in point of proof, as of illus-

tration.—Taking Revelation, however, in a more particular sense, to import the *Christian* institution, they will answer both purposes and serve to establish the *general* conclusion, with greater force in its more *particular* application.—Numberless other instances every one's patient perusal of the sacred records will supply him with, each of which being wrought into a separate argument, and classed in the division to which it naturally belongs, will, all united, place the importance of History, as a medium of Christianity, in a point of view eminently conspicuous and convincing.

4 AP 54

F I N I S.